

R U N E T R O O P E R S O

ルーンTROOPERズ

自衛隊漂流戦記 2

浜松春日

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Rune Troopers

vol.2

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Prologue

Somewhere in the South Sea United Kingdom of Mariisua —

Under a perfectly blue sky, the ground is gold — well-grown wheat is blown by the wind and is playing a quiet melody line. The scenery is spreading out, quiet, and peaceful — almost to the extent that it becomes tiring.

Looking up the sky, seemingly getting bored from the bottom of her heart, she sighed, “Whew,” and lied on the straw piled up on the buggy.

“Ma’am, where do you think you are going to from the next town, by the way?”

“What?”

The unknown old coachwoman asked her a question from the box seat. She met her on her way to the town to sell some farm goods and got on the buggy. She likes vegetables, but the coach’s smell of potatoes made her feel sick. Yet, she could not complain about it because she rode the buggy for free.

“Well, I just feel like seeing the ocean.”

“Haha, that’s nice. I heard you can see something rare there now.”

“Something rare?” Her eyes began to shine as her excitement grew.

Taking the rein, the old lady looked back to her and proudly said, “Granny, do you know about the battle that happened the other day?”

“Yes, about the Mariisua

army holding off the ambush of the Devolution Imperial Army?” She heard the story from here and there when she was in the last town. In that town, there was even an extra edition of the newspaper published, and there was a herd of people there. Moreover, she strangely heard a minstrel singing a song at a bar about the battle based on what he saw — thinking about the distance and time, it seems that he wasn’t actually there.

Mariisua

victory has given hope to other countries which are threatened by the invasion of the empire, but she was skeptic about the breaking news itself. She thought that

Mariisua had just held off the reconnaissance unit.

“The empire’s thread is everywhere, so the people in town were so happy about the news.”

“Right, right?!” The old lady of Mariisua

looked so proud of the news as if it was her own success.

“Wait, but even if they really did hold off the invincible dragon warriors, if that’s true, how does

Mariisua have so much power?”

“It is because Lady Hamea summoned an army from a parallel universe to fight for them.”

She got up with surprise. “An army from a parallel universe? What’s that? She summoned an army, not summoned beasts?” She was sitting crossed-legged with poor manners and asking questions with interest.

“I do not know about it in detail, but the Mariisua

had support from that army and fought back against the dragons.”

‘How stupid...’ she thought. Does this old lady know how much force is needed to stand a chance against dragons? She had some experience in battle, so she knew that it is impossible to hold off the dragons, even if they summoned beasts.

“Stupid?...Hmm...”

“I have been living for 190 years, but I’ve never heard such a bullshit story.”

“Oh! Even as a distinguished elf, you think so?”

“...Damnit, I don’t understand why you believe in it so much.” There is no need to complain about things to this kind old lady. She had a stretch.

At that time, she realized the reason why the old lady let this shady traveller get on the buggy. Long and narrow ears like bamboo leaves. And surprisingly

white, beautiful skin. She was an elf; a guardian of the forest with mystique and longevity.

However, she began to notice the crests on the woman's cheeks, arms, and thighs, all of which are signs exclusively of the high-elf race. It is rare for elves to show themselves in public, but she was an exception. The old lady had foreseen good in her and willingly gave her a ride, either because of her beauty or for a rare encounter with an elf itself.

Even though she is an elf, which should be mysterious, she had a smile on her face as though she were a lesser being.

"An army from a parallel universe. That sounds...interesting," she mumbled. This beautiful woman wore earrings on her distinguished elf ears and was scantily clad. Here, she found a reason to go on her next journey.

At night, almost all of the members of a tribe gathered at the centre court of the reservation. Because of the number of fighters lost in battle, the number of men had become few, and most of the people there are women and kids. Even now, there must be someone getting injured and bleeding.

On the faces of women who are supposed to be waiting for their husbands to come back to them, they look fatigued to the point of giving up on the men ever returning.

That look was not only for the women, however. All of the faces there lit up by the light of the bonfire had a feeling of heavy anxiety.

At the centre of the court field, a girl standing at a point where everyone was visible called out in order to blow away their fatigue and anxiety.

"There is an order from the general!" Everyone began looking at her. With short silver hair and scarlet-colored eyes, she wore tight and skinny black-colored leathers and had two short swords called 'Jamadaharu.'

It was a strange to see because she was so young. From her appearance, she looked perhaps 15 years old or so. No one expected anything from her small, unmatured body. But everyone there listened sincerely to her words; not to anyone else but the daughter of the head of the tribe.

"This is about a mission on Demetel Continent." With that, groans began to

spread like a calm wave. A continent overseas is too far. Not only that, it made matters worse that the continent is not ruled by the Emperor. From his or her experience, everyone knows that this kind of mission in which there is no support in the middle of enemy territory makes the possibility of survival very bleak. Plus, even though the Emperor had issued a gag order, they had heard the story of nobody returning from the Demetel Continent.

It was the worst possible situation.

“Do we have to send our family again?” asked a mother of three sons lost in battle, this time asking for the sake of her beloved last living son.

“There is no need to worry. We will not take anybody important from anyone.”

With face bearing a painful expression, she answered the question. The last son of this mother is younger than the girl is.

In addition, the girl declaimed with a loud voice, “I have decided this with the general. I will be on the mission by myself this time.”

There were panicked voices, even some like screams, coming from here and there. “It can’t be! You are also the last child of the head of the tribe...”

“I am not a kid anymore. Since my father has passed away, I am the head of this tribe.” She stood firmly. This was all for relieving the people of her tribe, but the people still seemed to not agree with it. Of course, the girl expected this was coming, so she kept talking.

“The goal for this mission, if successful, is to bring all of the people on the battlefield back home.” The groans got louder. The people waiting for their families to return were looking at each other’s faces with hope and anxiety.

Then, they all stared at her. If she goes for this mission and she makes it, everything will be alright... As a daughter of the head of the tribe, maybe this is what she does, isn’t it?

These people that once had sympathy for her started to become inconsolable and unable to hide their emotions. She did not blame them.

“Thus, I am going.” For her, everyone had the same feeling of respect as they

had had for the head of the tribe. Then, they all bowed, and with this, the tribe had once again become one unit. It was solemn but tragic scene.

“My sister!” Suddenly, some children put their arms around the girl. People tried to stop them, but the girl stared at the children and was able to make them release her.

“My sister, are you going far away?”

“Are you not coming back like our father?”

The girl bent her knees in order to look straight into their tearful eyes. Then, she nodded her head kindly like a mother and said, “Do not worry. I shall be back.”

The children had eyes that shined full of hope. “Really?”

“Yes, I mean it.” Putting their cheeks on the smiling girl, they also had smiles on their faces.

‘I want to keep them smiling...’ The girl thought so from the bottom of her heart. In this cruel world, for things that mean something, something has to be done. That is, to save these children. There is nothing that can replace them; they are family.

After the death of the head of the tribe, one of the female soldiers whispered, “Good luck.” The girl firmly nodded. Then, she took out her swords with lightning speed and crossed them. There was a look of a searching assassin on her face — a white sword blade and scarlet-colored eyes in the moonlight.

To hearten everyone and to show how the tribe can make it through, she called out, “For the pride of dark elves!” There was the pride of the dark elf, of which humans are afraid of as symbol of evil and death.

Chapter 1 – After The War

The sky was clear, and clear was the sea. This color is often referred to as “marine blue”, thought Kaburagi. There is no other word that could fit this color, it’s the beauty of the sea, even if this sea is a sea of another world. He was watching the sea from an observation place called “wing”, located beyond the ship’s bridge.

“Would you mind ice coffee?” – asked a young man with two cups of coffee in both his hands and stood beside Kaburagi.

“Thanks,” – shortly thanked him Kaburagi and took a cup of coffee.

The atmosphere that the man was making was so simple that nobody would guess that he was the admiral, if he wasn’t wearing the clothes of the Maritime Self-Defense Forces and the corresponding badge of the rank.

“Did something happen? You’re watching the sea from here anytime you have some free time.”

He leaned to the wing’s fence with a cup of coffee, so did the young man named Katou, the chief of the staff. It’s hard to understand that from his strange smile covered by glasses. Kaburagi slightly smiled to the question of his subordinate.

“I’m not as young as you,” he answered and turned his eyes to the sea again. Five ships including their own are sailing in the front, and the capital of the Mariisua, Seiroad City is now behind.

The contrast between the city with plenty of white houses that is looking like a city of the medieval Europe of the Earth, and the Aegis fleet that was created considering stealth functionality, must have made him think it’s some kind of joke.

“It feels unrealistic, doesn’t it?” – asked Katou, and his words were awfully precise. Yes, you’re dead right, thought Kaburagi.

“Yes. That’s true for drifting into another world, and for participating in the

fight there.”

It was a week ago. A sudden “change” wrapped the fleet, and when we, the United Nation Contingent Maritime Self-Defense Forces, noticed, we were trapped into another world, and sailed to the United Kingdom of the Southern Sea Mariisua which is being conquered by so-called Filborg Inheritance Empire’s Army.

The helicopter that was sent for intelligence cracked up by the Empire’s Army. The squad members who left unharmed used heavy artillery against a dragon and destroyed it. This is how we were engaged in the war. We had no choice but to enforce our armed might in order to protect the people of the country and our staff from death.

The choice was either to watch from warm seats how people die, or rush into the war. It was an ultimate decision.

As a result, many soldiers of Filborg were wounded and killed.

No-war is a national policy of Japan. The Self-Defense Force of Japan is oriented solely to defense. So it was a deviant deed as for them, and Kaburagi along with the other troops understand that. Yet, the fact is that we prevented the falling meteorite attack on the city, and saved tens of thousands of people who are living in the capital city.

The war was not good. Both the Empire soldiers and Mariisua citizens have put their lives on the line. That is why we had to justify our deed using those lives as a shield.

Kaburagi was watching the blue sky.

(Was our decision correct?)

But no answer came, no matter how much time he was thinking. It felt like walking an endless route. Kaburagi felt anxious even now, however he didn’t show that to his subordinates as he has the responsibility of the given order. He put the cold coffee to his mouth.

It was a beautiful sea, with no plastic garbage here and there.

Phew~Phew~, a high pitch voice sounded, – it was a formation of giant birds with people riding them. The Ayamu Erang Sachum, a light-armed air warrior

unit. Controlling the bird, three of the warriors on the bird came closer to the ship's bridge, and saluted by holding their swords at chests. Kaburagi replied by saluting to them as the Self-Defense Force do, holding a palm at his head.

Oh, they are unable to understand each other, but they can feel it. He smiled in his heart. A soldier must reply to salute with a salute. It's the same even in another world.

They are wearing different clothes, they have a different way of thinking, but they are still human.

"Wow-wow, but here is really a fantasy world, I must say," – Katouu was impressed by the flight of the giant birds, called an argentavis in this world, and the warriors on it, scratching his head under the cap with the "Ibuki" emblem on it.

(I thought this is a commonplace thing in manga's, anime's, or light novels... Like, being summoned into another world. REALLY?!? ~)

As part of the preparation for the long sea journey, Katou watched a lot of anime, manga, and light novels, and brought his favorites in the ship. He was a full-engaged otaku, including occult interests. He was a type of otaku who can consume everything.

(TL Comment: Ah, So He's Like Itami From Gate Jieitai)

The genre of people summoned to another world was amongst his favorites, too. Yet, their circumstances are rather unique. Usually, a normal human with no power or the like, who could at most have a pet in the original world, meets with a tsundere girl and becomes betrothed to her, and then a princess or such of that world is asking to save the world. Now things are different, is it good or bad.

Katou is watching an escort vessel that has cast anchor and waiting. The fleet's ship "Ibuki" are equipped with a nuclear missile defense system, BMD, which is overmuch for the drifting ships. Japan possesses the armed group Self-Defense Forces. It's dangerous for a protagonist who has the only good point being "nice", and for this world.

(That's a good protagonist type. At very least, he wouldn't play live coals role,

in most cases. By the way...)

Katou looked at Kaburagi nearby.

(Why would they summon an old man like him?)

(More than that, why am I standing next to this old man who is going to retire soon even after I was summoned?) This made Katou unhappy.

“Did you think of something rude just now?”

“N-no, I didn’t!”

Kaburagi was drinking his coffee worrying about the elusive personality of this Katou. How sarcastic it is drinking this instant coffee, with its cheap taste and aroma while watching this fantastic scenery...

I guess, for those people that were riding the argentavis our evil-fighter ship is some kind of a miracle, as well. after all, The Aegis fleet with Self-Defense Forces flag has thrown down the masterpiece of a dragon squad of Filborg Inheritance Empire Army.

That day, after the salute under the fleet, the leader of the light-armed air warrior unit, Karuda, participated in the meeting at the kings castle. The Queen is listening to even such unproductive meetings, and something is different now... I hoped, but nothing changed, as I thought. Karuda was bored, and one of the generals have risen his hoarse voice.

“We could never trust those men!”

Many voices agreed with him.

“The general is right! Is there a reason to trust the men who just came from nowhere?”

Karuda frowned at that. He looked through her monocle at the men in armor.

(Those inland army folk again...)

They have occupied the space around one yard from the throne. Karuda sounded his tongue with disapproval. The same hoarse voice continued.

“They are soldiers from another world! There was no single hero that came such an ugly path.”

His name is Vrengel, the Commander in Chief of the Inland Army of the United Kingdom of the Southern Sea Mariisua. As the Mariisuan name has “United Kingdom”, the Mariisua also contains Mariisuans, people of the sea, whose country is located from the sea archipelago to the mainland.

Also, as the royal capital Seiroad is a port city, the Royal Capital Defense Squad traditionally composed of Mariisuans, as opposed to the inland army, which is protecting inland cities, composed of non-Mariisuans. Defense of the ground border was their duty. This is the reason why Vrengel and other inland squads did not see the Rune Troopers at that fight.

Seiroad was under sudden attack, and they promptly withdrew the inland army from the borders, yet when the inland army arrived at the city, everything was over.

What did they see? That suspicious army from another world is honored at their fatherland.

“But why did you let them disembark in the royal capital? They have pitched a camp in the Seikobo Park, and brought a lot of strange things! They must be plotting something ill!”

Karuda then stood up.

“It was me who invited the “troops of the land” into the capital. As many of the elite troops were killed in the fight, the Queen gave a permit to ask them for help.”

“Help, you say?”

“They proposed their help when they saw the war slaughtering our citizens.”

Somebody laughed calmly.

“What nonsense! Why would somebody who is not even from our country, would want to help us?”

“That’s...” – Karuda silenced. After all, she didn’t fully understand the reason as well. The army from the other world proposed to save their people for no reward. Karuda and other Mariisuans soldiers were thinking about how to regroup, and they almost forgot about the people, so they were surprised by that proposal. In this country, an army serves for either fight an enemy or

protect own country. There is nothing about saving people. Karuda was impressed by their thoughts. She understood that they are driven by completely different values.

Then, she saw them desperately saving injured people. The heroes who have saved the country are covered in mud trying to save people. They were crying for those they failed to save.

Karuda felt strange and asked one of the soldiers of the “troops of the land”, why they are sad when people of an unrelated country are dying? As a human race, they are different from the Mariisuans.

Their face, hair color, everything except that they are both humans are different.

«Because I know Hansin-Awaji* and East Japan. I just can't see them as a bystander.»

After answering this way, the middle-aged soldier took his subordinates and they went to save the injured again. Karuda couldn't comprehend what he said, she only understood that something inside them prevents them to be bystanders. Karuda remembered that and tears appeared in her eyes. Why did they save people? It wasn't for money or honor. They had no ulterior motives. Yet, their deed was so uncommon that it's only natural to be suspicious and assume that they are planning something ill.

Also, she knows a man from the other world called Kuze, his weakling face. But also she knows a number of his altruistic deeds. Therefore, she has the only way to answer, despite she doesn't understand them, and nobody understands them, too.

“Because it was natural for them.”

As expected, Karuda was criticized.

“Are you trying to say that saving another country for no money is natural? It's uncommon even for saints!”

“I bet they're plotting to occupy our country from the inside!”

“We have to use Inland Army to block them!”

Unfortunately, many of them agreed. She also remembers that they used words “disaster relief”, and she didn’t want to stop their activity. Hence, she got desperate.

“Tell me, general Vrengel, did you, along with your warriors, lay a finger to restore the city? Did you lend them a helping hand, share their sorrow?”

“What are you talking about? We’re the elite, we don’t have to.”

Karuda surprised upon hearing his words. Why did she say it? Vrengel is right, the elite doesn’t have to share people’s pain. Rather, the people should be glad that the country is protected, their sorrow is nothing comparing to that.

However, at the same time, she felt it strange thinking this way, because she witnessed what the army from the other world did. They don’t think about that for sure. But why? Despite she didn’t understand them she admired them. But she couldn’t disagree with Vrengel’s words.

Those who notice she’s prostrated rose their voices.

“Don’t change the topic, you traitor!”

“Are you an elite of the mariisuans?!”

“Who are you calling a traitor?! Nobody loves the country more than me! Isn’t this a country comprised of its people?! That’s why I have no intention of stopping them! By the way, how could you propose us to block them? Don’t make me laugh! Once you proclaim a war to them, you’d best prepare a grave for yourself! Are you going to destroy this country?” – she yelled with anger in her voice. The meeting became disturbingly noisy.

“What?! Are you talking to the Inland Army?!” – young general exploded with rage as if he would draw his sword now.

“The Royal Capital Defense Squad have been listening silently, but we can’t allow that insult!” – added Chief of The Knights of Mariisua, known for his militant line.

“I did not protect the castle! They’re the ones who saved the country and no one else!”

Karuda tried to convince them, but Inland Army men didn’t hear her words.

Vrengel began to speak sharply.

“If they are this strong, they would have already conquered this country! But they haven’t, so they are weak! We, the Inland Army are in good form, so we can strike them down with a single blow!”

Vrengel bowed down in front of the throne. Karuda felt it was dangerous. Many of elite of the Royal Capital Defense Squad who could support her have died in the recent fight, which makes the Inland Army’s word most weighty here.

“Your Majesty Hamieea! We will destroy the bandits who are to conquer the country! Please, give us the order!”

Karuda’s heart was about to stop there. The meeting silenced after the Vrengel’s words. But Vrengel didn’t want the silence. The silence burn to not impede words of that who is sitting on the throne.

The throne is placed deep in the room enclosed by cloth, so we can’t see the face of that who is sitting there.

“I hath been in the castle, Vrengel,” – her silent voice was heard.

“Ah, ha!” – Vrengel prostrated himself. Power of the voice was enough to bow down such an arrogant man.

“I hath witnessed with my own eyes the might of the arrived army.” Her voice sounded calm, yet there was something unknown beyond the voice. Vrengel sweated.

“But this is...”

“I say Chief Karuda’s words are indeed correct. However, thou doth be correct, as well.”

“Oh! This means...”

Her next words resounded as a response to his.

“Well, then.”

We can see her standing up. The statesmen inside the room prostrated, and we can hear her barefoot steps on the carpet. “Ku-fu-fu”, the modest laughter

as of an old cunning fox was heard and she rose her voice again.

“Lets test them. Let them show us their proof of strength.”

It was the order of the Queen.

Hamieea was standing on a terrace in meditative mood, when an elite woman approached her from the back. Her name was Karuda.

“You’ve been called out to the meeting with a weak hand.”

“Not at all.”

Hamieea smiled sadly.

“I shall be frank. This further deed ought look like a betrayal to the Rune Troopers.”

“I understand your feelings.”

The young queen was looking down at the five ships that came to the moorings in Seiroad.

“We hath erred in having the “troops of the land” disembark here.”

Hamieea regretted that promise she gave thinking about the citizens after the fight was over. Karuda then informed her about the current state of the Rune Troopers.

“I think their distribution of the boiled food that they are doing as their “disaster relief” will end soon.”

Delivery of goods must have ceased due to the war disaster, and the citizens are unable to get those provisions, so the Rune Troopers are feeding the hungry people by the queen’s request, not by their own. However, it was a matter of trust that they will receive provisions after that. If not, food distribution scales would be quite smaller.

Hamieea made a sad sigh, which was rare for her. Probably, that’s because she remembered her talk with the general Kaburagi using a magic tool, a radio.

«We had a UN support mission before this happened, so this can be considered as our duty as well, and my subordinates have an urge to go, so let’s begin.»

Hamieea was thinking about the number of people who were saved by that. Usually, she would laugh in her mind for that softie man, but his good intents must have touched her and she cried after the conversation. She was disappointed in herself for betraying them, and she clenched her fists tightly. It's hard to ignore the Inland Army that possessed most part of the military forces, even for a queen.

It's normal for military forces to support the country. The power of a queen that is not supported by forces is not a power, and Hamieea is not an exception.

"I hath been so weak... Unable overcome those obstacles at all costs, unlike the predecessors."

"Queen..."

There was nobody except Karuda on the terrace who could hear her whining. Karuda understood that the queen is trusting her, because she was fighting in that hopeless battle along with the Rune Troopers.

"I can hold general Vrengel from excessive measures. However, it seems I'm unable to reimburse provisions for the Rune Troopers for a while..."

All roads to the capital are controlled by the Inland Army. They would not allow provision delivery for the Rune Troopers at some point. That's a bad situation, indeed. The goodwill of the Rune Troopers is violated. Moreover, we had them to bear those expenses for nothing.

"Let's tell them, that we, at least, do all that we could."

"No need. I doubt they shalt listen to unrequited trust."

Karuda's face clouded watching the sad queen. She has pledged her loyalty to the queen, and she can't cause a damage to the weakened back. Hamieea understood that, and gave a proposition for her.

"We must talk with them. We have to do the next move in order to have them being accepted by the country."

Hamieea didn't give up. She probably won't revive broken trust, but she still has the future. They have shown that to her.

"So we will conduct a meeting to ask them for proof."

“Could you please go and aboard that ship?”

“Gladly, if it’s your order, your Majesty.”

The Rune Troopers were going to face with the new page of their history in the other world.

On the Aegis ship, “Ibuki”, Kaburagi and Katou were talking about a report.

“So the Ground SDF that started the relief mission in the capital are waiting for orders?”

“Yeah. Because retreat operations would produce disturbance.”

It seems the unit of the ground SDF that was sent to relieve after-war disturbance is oppressed by the Inland Army and encamped. Katou didn’t say that out, but he didn’t expect trouble after the queen gave them permission. Despite monarchy existing in the country, there was no dictatorship, and he couldn’t completely understand that.

Katou tried to think up a good plan, but nothing came to his mind. Kaburagi was watching the wide broad sea waves, feeling the warm Mariisua wind. Katou was looking through his binoculars.

They were suddenly summoned to a another world. They are unable to contact not only Japan, they can’t even connect to their own world. The leadership of the fleet, its crew, and SDF is solely on their shoulders. Fortunately, the SDF is an armed group, which is a great help for dealing with unexpected occasions. The relief is that SDF that is under the command of Kaburagi who shows no sign of disturbance.

Observing the city through the binoculars, Katou noticed something.

“It seems there is no crowd of people around the port, unlike yesterday.”

Until yesterday, many people have come to see SDF fleet, I guess, out of curiosity. Katou felt like he is on The Black Ships, but today the Inland Army have calmed down the port, and the place is almost empty of people.

“It seems Queen Hamieea is troubled,” – said Kaburagi and frowned at the cape tip, where the castle is located. It’s nice that we won the defensive war, however many countries fell into poverty and chaos after that. Kaburagi can

only believe in that young queen's abilities.

“By the way, could you please stand up already?”

Kaburagi looked at another person who was on the wing. An overcoat laced with marks of her unit is slipped on her shoulders, covering her breast-long dark-green hair. Kaburagi and Katou were dressed not in their casual fatigues, but the summer suits type three. Her view was out of place.

But not only that. Ever since she came here and until the talks ended, her posture, standing on her single knee and head drooped down, did not moved a bit.

“No, general Kaburagi, please don't mind me,” – answered Karuda. Kaburagi looked calm, but he didn't really understand how to deal with her. She came here secretly by a small boat, unofficially, so he said there is no need to behave as a delegate. That's why she was invited to the bridge. You can enjoy the fine prospect from here, and should be no strange tense to a partner, he thought, but it was unnecessary.

“G-general...”

Kaburagi was uncertain. SDF is not an army, so “General” is not applicable to them. Actually, there is an equivalent “major general” rank of the Ground Forces, that sound similar to his rank, a rear admiral, but still it's too much to be referred as “General”.

Officially, there is no army in Japan, so logically there is no general. Karuda was confused, too.

(I wondered what kind of a General possesses such a power, but this is...) – she thought after looking at his face for a moment. The recent war victory ceremony was postponed as people of the Inland Army entered to the inner space of the throne room, so she didn't meet him yet.

(Isn't he a middle-aged man? His suit is practically the same as the other men wear.)

She didn't understand the meaning of shoulder straps, so she couldn't see the difference between Kaburagi and Katou. In this world, a military uniform of different ranks and statuses has clear and obvious distinctions.

“Well, the admiral is saying so, you’d better stand up,” – said Katou and lively smiled to Karuda, however she shook her head quickly.

“Oh, I can’t! How can somebody like me to behave such in front of a person of high rank...”

“That’s okay. When he’s walking on the deck nobody thinks he’s the admiral at all.”

“Oh, that’s not your business.”

Karuda was confused even more. Why is this army so soft on discipline? A man next to him... He was introduced as Katou. The country was saved by the bizarre plan in the last battle. Apparently, he is of a lower rank, but that’s excessively rude! Usually, this attitude would be judges for misconduct.

“Oh, don’t listen to this idiot. Well... This is not an official meeting, so we can have a better conversation if our eyes on the same level. Don’t you think so?” – Kaburagi agreed with Katou. She just can’t ignore after all this being said. Karuda stood up steadily. Sea breeze touched her cheeks, and wavered her hair. She felt that the scenery she saw only kings are allowed to see.

(What an incredible ship!)

This ship is like an island itself. It’s too big and too firm to be called just a ship. A ship is always nothing but a wooden construct that people use to float on the sea and not to die if they are fortunate. But this ship is completely different. She was surprised that it was made of steel, but its comfortableness is completely unexpected.

First, she can’t feel any swaying like on any other ship. She heard that the bigger the ship the weaker its swinging, yet this is no different from being on the ground, owing to the so-called fin stabilizer technology, but she doesn’t know that.

Another thing she was surprised was the light inside the ship. She stood stiff for a few seconds after entering a corridor, watching the fluorescent illumination. She must have thought that it’s dark inside since there are no windows.

(Are they catching light essence?)

Karuda stretched her hand towards the old blinking fluorescent lamp, but a crewman warned her that it's dangerous. Then, an ineffable coldness she felt even before coming here. She doesn't know what an air conditioner is, so she thought there should be a lot of water inside the ship. This ship must be using water to move. This ship is an island or a castle... Maybe, both of that.

Karuda was a smart woman, so she tried to understand as much as possible.

(I guess making them the enemy is suicidal.)

And the man in front of her who is the supreme person on this fleet...

(What are you thinking about, general Kaburagi? What do you want? Money? Honor? Or some kind of women? Or...)

Karuda had bad premonition in her mind.

(Could it be... a sacrifice?)

She wouldn't surprise if they require human blood to maintain this collection of magical items. She even calculated how many people they could gather for a sacrifice. She has no hatred or evil will towards SDF, she is rather curious what kind of people they are.

Yet, when she boarded the ship, she felt the same fear that came to her during the battle. Despite in believing they won't harm them, somewhere in her heart, she was afraid of those magical items that could be turned against her country; it was an instinct, like a man who is afraid of a beast. In the end, she could think that even they would ask for a sacrifice in exchange for their lives, it would be good for all that.

(Oh, I see now. That's what kind of discomfort, anxiety, and malaise that Vrengel and others were driven by.)

She became sad. She realized that if she were to make a mistake, she will become like Vrengel and begin to suspect the men from the other world, and look for a legitimate reason to eliminate them in order to protect herself.

"General Kaburagi."

"What is it?"

"I'm afraid of you."

She understood that it's rude, but she believed that they wouldn't blame her. Kaburagi looked at her serious face and smiled a bit.

"That can't be helped."

Yet, Karuda continued.

"But I like you, as well. I feel it for the first time..."

That's right, and that's why she must succeed in this closely guarded secret meeting. She must not end up with them as an unknown alien enemy.

"We want you to show them the proof of a hero," – told Karuda to them.



The Ground SDF unit that was dispatched from the transport ship with disaster relief mission encamped in a part in the center of the city. They were running their field kitchen full power to provide war victims food; the field hospital in a truck aided wounded and sick people. But when Inland Army came they had to stop their activities.

"They don't understand a thing!"

The stout build middle-aged man entered the tent that serves as their headquarters and spoke to the leaders. He took off his camouflage hat, and slapped a seasoned long desk, sitting on a pipe chair. He had grown a nice mustache, so his figure sitting on the chair seemed like it came from a painting. His name is Doi Kotaro, he is a Ground SDF colonel, the main responsible for this mission. Kaburagi has the command authority above all, but Ground SDF is beyond his authority, so Ground SDF won't move without Doi's order. Yet, speaking about recent joint operations, Doi never disobeyed Kaburagi's orders, as Kaburagi has the authority of land-sea-and-air operations.

However, the results of the Kaburagi's order of this relief mission are not impressive.

"The Maritime SDF seems to be ignorant of the current situation, but my bad premonition was correct."

His words were dirty, but his subordinates who went long road together knew that he has no ill intent.

"Those Inland Army guys have cut off us around and surrounded us. That's what happens when you enter into another country with no backstairs dealing."

Doi has a quarrel with an Inland Army commander. His tanned face warped and he looked at his team officers and understood that they didn't get what he's saying.

"Well, we had no time to build connections with locals in this situation..." – said one of the officers. Doi slapped his both knees.

"That's true, there is no point to gripe after the battle. The Maritime SDF decision wasn't wrong."

Doi didn't hate Kaburagi, he was rather on good terms with him. Yet, Maritime SDF knows only their sea. There is nothing but a bed, shower, and toilet in the sea. On the ground, you have to build everything from scratch. But to avoid useless chaos in such unknown countries, you can't avoid all risks without deliberate investigations and networking. This time, we saved many lives by sudden invasion, and the suddenness has increased number of troubles. Being seen as the enemy by the Inland Army is one of those troubles.

“Second lieutenant Kuze, how is it going on?”

The officer Kuze’s face became complicated.

“Confirmation received.”

“As expected, we’re done.”

Kuze was responsible for providing food for war victims. Recently, he noticed something strange. In fact, SDF made provisions for war victims, but food distribution was the duty of the Kobokyo Church. It was originally requested from the church, and SDF decided that it would be more effective, and that church has only good intents. But church clerks have another reason to be nice, and SDF has discovered it recently.

The church distributed the food made by SDF as if it was made by the church. SDF was delivering food early in morning to the back door of the church. After they left provision, joyous yelps and prayers were heard. And now it’s clear why it was a need to left provisions there.

Today, Kuze made an investigation after the provision was delivered. On that square, he found a lofty minister gathering victims and lecturing them.

“God and the Church never abandon its deprived believers. After we repelled the crude Empire, the Church is going to distribute this food that we protected! Now give prayer to God and gratitude to the Church!”

Protected, he said, despite all cans have light-pink marks that SDF puts on all SDF belongings.

“The church is great, we can have a soup with meat for free!” – said one of the victims, a mother with a child on her back, and her husband smiled.

“Yeah, I thought it was wrong that the church didn’t fight, but now...”

“What a tasty soup! If the church can make it every day, I must bow them,” – said a young man next to them.

“But how long the heretics in the park would stay? I wish the church would think about them when things are settled.”

Kuze couldn’t hear anymore of this and left.

“I heard the Japanese dislike mercenary motives...” – he said, and the report is over. All officers made a deep sigh.

The church had left the people right after battle began, and blocked inside the building, but now they’re trying everything to nullify those minus points. They are willing to use everything, SDF or not.

Of course, even if SDF tell them the truth, the people poisoned by religious devotion would rather believe in the church, even if the church would say it’s a groundless charge. The church should understand that as well. Doi folded his hands, saying that we were had, and looked up on the tent’s ceiling.

Back in the past, he was in a similar situation in Iraq, but due to established connections with their leader he said “You’re wrong,” and no problem followed. However, speaking about the rushed invasion, we have no ally here.

(That’s what happening if you remove “Thorough preparation” from the slogan of the Ground SDF, “Thorough preparation and hardening of the arteries”)

Doi scratched his butch haircut. In the end, they have no space for a move, and SDF treatment is getting closer to that of an enemy, with the part of being not thanked by the people. Then, the Inland Army was like salt into a wound.

The plan of using a shovel car or bulldozer to remove lumber and trash to do more obvious activities is now impossible.

“The provisions we brought is coming to an end. The Mariisua won’t give us anything, so our activity is going to end soon, too,” said one of the officers.

“Oh, stop that, I got it already...” – said Doi, pushing the space between his eyebrows by his finger.

The Ground SDF was working only due to the queen’s promise. In the Inland Army made that impossible, we have to stop that. When the heaviness of the meeting atmosphere reached its limit...

“I have a proposition,” –a breathy voice of a woman sounded.

“What is it, captain Itai?” – called her name Doi sitting in the same pose, and glared at her. The Ground SDF captain Itai Kaori is a smart-looking slim and tall

woman wearing the UN blue beret; she seems to be a bit older than Kuze. She is Kuze's superior officer.

"Why wouldn't we start gathering information and getting allies from now, in order to escape from the current situation? Despite the reversed sequence, those are the urgent tasks."

"How? We are surrounded and watched by the Inland Army," – asked Doi with irritation.

"We can do the small-numbered reconnaissance. We have surplus cadre right now. I'd like to give them a mission."

"What?" – Doi changed his posture and looking at her with rounded eyes.

"Can you do it, second lieutenant Kuze, right?"

"Eh?" – Kuze was looking carefully at his chief Itai. It was a complete surprise for him.

"Right, Kuze?" – Itai added with a wide smile on her face. For the first sight, it's a smile of a beautiful woman. Kuze has seen this smile a few times before, because she was his senpai in National Defense Academy. This was Satan's smile.

At a popular festival of the NDA, the battalion competition the bo-taoshi*, she showed the same smile to him.

"Just for you to know, if you lose, you'll be treated as first-year students, not third-year. Can you do it, Kuze-kun?"

By the way, first-year students of the Japan NDA are known as the sole creatures on the Earth that have no human rights. If a bed sheet is not smooth enough, that bed could be disassembled and its owner would be thrown outside. At a holiday, a student may be not approved to go outside for a reason such as "your eyes are not bright enough." In summer, at the crossing the Tokyo Bay, and if a celebrity is making a special release nearby during the crossing of Tokyo Bay, such students would have a swimming tournament not so far away, but far enough to not bother that celebrity. A usual university student's life which glorifies youth would look like a completely different world.

Kuze's will to spend calmly that country-approved legendary rough-and-

tumble competition Bo-taoshi, regarding which it is said, “It’s a miracle that nobody died there,” was completely destroyed by Itai’s smile. Kuze was the only one at that competition who was truly ready to die when he did his suicide attack at the bar; he was beaten and kicked by more than 150 men of the enemy’s team, he was covered with blood, but kept up holding the bar. It seems he got a lucky kick by knee, and when overcoming pain he went to hospital after the competition, they found a crack in his rib.

“I...”

Kuze felt that traumatic feeling again and opened his mouth.

“I can!” – he said bravely, yet his eyes look like he has died.

“You heard him, colonel Doi.”

When Itai became Doi’s subordinate, he warned them not to sexually harass her, but now it seems as though it’s time to start worrying about power harassment.

Chapter 2 – Guidance

“Me, again?”

From the next day, he was released from kitchen duty, so Ichinose was still sleeping in his sleeping bag, when Kuze came to his tent and told about the mission.

“I’m sorry, I can’t find anybody more convenient than you.”

Kuze leaned on and smiled looking at Ichinose. He was half-serious, after all. Kuze already saw Ichinose’s sniping skills and ability to work in emergency cases in battles. However, despite it’s reassuring to have a veteran as a subordinate, this mission doesn’t completely fit Ichinose. Probably, this mission requires somebody who can react persistently and steadily. In this meaning, Ichinose is the best. Probably, that’s why company commander appointed him. At least, it’s not a mission for blockheads amongst those officers.

Kuze rose up. Probably, officers like him are the most caretakers in SDF.

“Okay, go on and have a meal now. We’re gathering in 30 minutes, at 0730. Any questions?”

“None...” – Ichinose gave a sleepy answer to his commander. Kuze left the sleeping Ichinose in his tent and went to make preparations.

At first, open a file with today’s plans.

The intelligence collecting units is comprised by two people. Walking distance is limited, so usage of an unremarkable car is allowed. There is no military necessity for arms, but due to unpredictable events, personal self-defense arms that are under strict control are allowed. Usage against commoners for intimidation purposes is strictly prohibited. Okay... Walk around the city and gather all available information.

“That’s nice, just walk around...”

Well, that’s all you can think up right now. Overall, it’s like do what you need, the reconnaissance in force. Well, that’s not so cool. Kuze finished the paperwork and went to the center of the park with the keys of the car. The

weather was a little chilly and it was a pleasant morning.

“I don’t really like it...”

Actually, Kuze wanted to draw in one more person.

A water-drawing was placed near the church kitchen.

Kuze found that there was woman. Long sea-color hair, and white with dark-blue priest’s clothes. She was Ryumi, and she woke up first and was doing laundry.

She has a lot of provisions cans at her side. The cans have SDF’s light-pink marks. The rest of them were distributed yesterday. They were piled for return, but the duty of washing them was the duty of the SDFas well. Yet, Ryumi thought it’s rude and washed the cans alone.

She felt it’s wrong, because it was Ryumi who asked the SDF to engage with the church to help distributing provisions among the war victims. Of course, Ryumi was driven by goodwill and sense of responsibility. At first, the church strictly refused that, saying that it’s rude towards God to feed people by heretics’ food.

Archpriest heard it, too.

Archpriest Geroud is the person who oversees the parish of the royal capital. The fat-belly man spilled anger and humiliation towards the church clerks.

“That’s true we’re in trouble with provisions right after the battle, and we would be glad to receive that even from heretics. But the church doesn’t have money to give heretics! And we can’t even guess how much those stupid heretics require!”

Along with few nuns who believe in her, Ryumi prayed for him.

“Archpriest! That’s wrong, they told they don’t need money!”

“For free?! Are you saying they would save people of another country for free?! What else they want? Some treasures stored in the church? Papers? What do they want?”

“They only want peace for poor people! We know them! Please, leave this to

us!”

In the end, they prevailed with the archpriest, and she reassured that her passion passed on to him. so she didn't think that things would go in a strange direction after she let them go. Therefore, when she noticed that the people from the other world are being betrayed, she couldn't do a thing.

Have they noticed already? What if they going here already, with weapons in their arms? Ryumi was anxious. She was in fear and self-reproach.
(My life was saved, but I...)

In that fight, she was saved by the warriors from another world. She saw the brave heroes who fought with that black dragon and defeated it. She thought she knows their spirit of standing beside the weak and fight together. Of course, she couldn't know that SDF legal interpretation and that SDF just happened to be there.

SDF were able to do a move because they were equipped for humanitarian support in Africa and had proper commodities and arms, despite food distribution caused distrust of the church's elite. Many various conditions inducted a current unhappy situation.

Her young heart was still pure enough to expect to a change with the Archpriest's mistakes. Right now she is doing her best to express gratitude to SDF by washing the cans. She didn't care if her thin fingers would rub away. It's nothing in comparison with the men with sore faces who have been delivering provisions every day.

(Even if they believe in something else, I believe their heart has the same...)

Thinking about it, she felt pained in her heart. At that moment she felt somebody behind her.

(Could it be Phana?)

She turned back.

Her roommate Phana is working hard this time, so she can't rely on her anymore. If she came to help, I should let her rest. However, her breath stopped in the moment she saw the man who came here. It was a young warrior from the other world.

“Good morning,” – he said with vigorous voice.

“Hya!” – screamed Ryumi and fell on her buttocks.

That’s because she remembered him. She was speaking to him, which resulted in the present situation. She couldn’t see anger on his face, but you never know what people from another world are thinking. She didn’t know why he came. People are afraid of the unknown.

“Are you alright? I’m sorry for coming this early.”

He approached Ryumi and stretched a hand to her. But she could grip that hand.

“W-why...”

“Eh?”

“I... I’ve betrayed you...”

Kuze scratched his head.

“We admit it was a painful mistake for us,” – he gave a bitter smile.

Ryumi just watching that smile.

“If I disapproved of every young girl like you who makes a mistake, I wouldn’t be able to work as an officer. Also, the country had promised to give us provisions, so it’s not just your fault, Ryumi-chan.”

Adults cannot just rely on the words of a teenage girl in a situation where immediate actions are required. In tense situations people tend to neglect the basic things. No SDF officer would ask a girl to answer for her words. SDF officers must be able to do self-examination. Hiding his shame, Kuze grabbed her hand and helped her stand up.

“A...!”

Ryumi noticed that she just broke a nun’s discipline.

“D-don’t!”

And she pulled back her hand.

“Wah!” – Kuze was surprised. It’s against the discipline for a nun to touch an

unmarried man, especially such a young man.

“Sorry, I was surprised,” – he apologized again, and Ryumi was worried. Kuze said “I did it again...” so quietly she couldn’t hear that, put off his cap and bowed. It’s no good to scare young girls.

“It’s okay, I was wrong, too.”

“Really? Thank you.”

Her breath was taken by his kind smile. But how can she repent that broken law?

(It’s okay, it was with a good intent...)

It was also prohibited to reject other’s goodwill, she convinced herself. Well, he didn’t come here with anger, and that’s good for now...

(Then, why did he came here?)

Ryumi was looking at Kuze with a question on her face.

“I have a request for you.”

Kuze felt bitter for his behavior which had been unsuitable for a civil officer.

“A request?”

For some reason, he felt guilty towards the chaste girl’s face.

(I guess I won’t be responsible for the abduction of an underage person...)

This is what he worried about. Yet, it was impossible to fulfill the order of that devilish commander that suddenly became a nice civil officer.

A motor pool near billeting place. Kuze is speaking with his subordinate in front of Pajero in

“Olive Drab” painting.

“Ichinose, do you have a driver’s license?”

“For a motorcycle...”

Okay... Which means, I have to drive alone. Kuze was taken aback by his own mistake. He opened the drivers side door and turned to Ryumi.

“Okay, Ryumi-san, please get in.”

A priest girl standing in front of a military vehicle... What a fantasy picture. Ryumi is standing still beside the iron box.

“Ah, eh... How do I open it?”

Oh, that’s right. There are no cars in this world. She doesn’t know where is the driver’s seat, where is the driver assistant’s seat, where are rear seats, and she doesn’t even know how to get inside. Kuze felt apologetic for applying his knowledge as common knowledge. Ichinose courteously opened a rear door.

“Please, sit here.”

“Thank you, sir Ichinose.”

Ryumi met Ichinose in the castle, so she remembers him. It was a good choice of a person. But Ryumi is Ryumi, she’s happy to serve.

(I hate to request her, but... Ryumi, you seem to be the type of person who is easily used by evil people...)

Thinking about this, Kuse turned the keys. He saw her surprised face through the back mirror.

“Kya! It moved?!”

The car began to move backward, and she desperately looking around.

“I can’t see any horses or land birds!”

It seems she can’t accept the fact that the car is moving on its own.

“Let’s talk to the Inland Army inspection, for starters.”

Other from that she is an acquaintance, Kuze had one more reason to bring her. She was necessary to break through an Inland Army’s checkpoint, while he doesn’t know where he is heading to.

In Japan there was a period where it was full of checkpoints. In order to pass them, you had to be either a street performer or a church person. It seems that the church is quite strong in this country. Probably, with Ryumi...

“Stop!”

After driving for a while, they ran into an inspection. Bloodthirsty warriors in uniforms that would rather fit medieval knights approached the car. The warriors that are stationed in the capital, like Karuda, are wearing a lighter uniform that corresponds to cultural patterns and more like the southern style, unlike the Inland Army, told Ryumi on the way. She said it's because there are many non-mariisuans. By the way, Ryumi is also a non-mariisuan, she came here from the mainland. It was another reason why Kuze thought they would break through flawlessly with her.

“Good morning.”

“Wha..! Mistress Kobokyo priest! Why are you in this carriage?”

As expected, an officer-like faced man was confused. Ryumi calmly smiled to him.

“It's my duty of guiding these men to their ship in the port.”

The Inland Army warriors didn't have any information about the SDF providing medical treatment and provisions for the locals. So Kuze and Ryumi had colluded that they would use it against the Inland Army.

“Oh! Why would a pure maiden observe such men...”

“Not at all! That's a priest's duty.”

Ryumi was nervous inside, but she didn't show that before the warrior. It was the first time she used her status.

“Let's assign a man from the army! As a knight, we can't allow a maiden to be amid such barbarians!”

They thought about possibility of using her trust, after all. Kuze thought it's bad, but...

“I am one of the leftovers of the priest warriors who were in the castle during that battle. My fellow-warriors have left to Valhalla already. Do you have any doubt in my knight's strength?” – said Ryumi with sharp eyes and tone of voice, that was never seen before.

The warriors' faces were full of dismay. To put disgrace on a priest means to put disgrace on God. Even if the priest is a girl.

“No, not by any means!”

The soldiers quickly left and prostrated.

“You warriors must have your own duties. I do not require your help,” – said Ryumi coldly and signaled by eyes to Kuze.

(Now.)

Kuze estimated a moment when they were oppressed and pressed on the gas. The warriors with shield screamed and ran away from the Pajero.

“We managed somehow.”

Kuze and Ichinose relaxed.

“Ryumi-chan, you’re great! I can’t believe you’re younger than me!” – Ichinose looked from the assistant’s seat at the rear seat.

“Uu-aa! What did I just do?!..”

Ryumi’s eyes were rounded and her face is pale. She was a diligent girl.

“I’m sorry. If something were to happen, I’ll take all responsibilities!”

Kuze was disappointed by drawing in various people.

“Second lieutenant Kuze, you’re just taking responsibility for everything since recently.”

“Oh, shut up! My salary is not that big as yours, you idiot!!”

The car full of people who can’t calm down broke into the city of the other world.

“The reconnaissance team of second lieutenant Kuze has entered.”

Itai repeated the report of successfully entering the city that was received by radio from the headquarters, to Doi.

“You have excellent soldiers who managed to break through that encirclement.”

Doi sat, like a big bear, put on some glasses and read the documents. He didn’t look in her eyes when he asked her to sit down too.

“Also, in that battle inside the castle, he made the best choices in the worst

possible situation.”

Itai thought that the man in front of her that is reading the documents is cute, and her opinion of him improved.

“As a person...”

Doi was reading the plan that Kuze made, but Doi was interested not in details, but in Kuze.

“In other words, it wasn’t the best choice as an SDF soldier?”

“Correct.”

“How do you see him, colonel Doi?” – asked Itai with testing voice. Doi took off his glasses and looked straight at her face.

“I see the younglings strive for safe military life. I heard that he is a hard worker, so I think he is not that bad.”

Itai smiled with her rare simple smile.

“I thought this way too, in the beginning.”

“Am I wrong?”

She nodded, lowered her eyes and began to remember the past.

“I understood something, as I watched him during the NDA period.”

“What is it?”

“All his moves are based on hard conviction. I think he himself has not noticed that yet, though.”

Itai stopped that human-eating attitude and looking at Doi seriously.

“Even he hasn’t noticed that, but he has conviction allowing him to endanger own life for somebody. This is what he is.”

Doi frowned and put the papers on the desk.

“They say that he planned to refuse any appointment before he finished NDA.”

SDF is the closed world, so it’s hard to find the source of these rumors. Especially rumors about officers.

“Yes, that’s true.”

Itai didn’t hide Kuze’s indistinct past. She knows him well, she knows him too well. Therefore, she didn’t want to hide anything about him.

“He asked me, whether he would be able to protect somebody if he graduated.”

Some kind of a snicker was heard from Doi’s direction.

“So green...”

“Yes. That’s why I envied him.”

The smile disappeared from Doi’s face. Itai’s face, on the other hand, returned to her usual aloof expression, yet Doi thought she has something to regret about.

“Weren’t you green in the past too?”^[1]

“I don’t know another man with such a strong will to protect somebody. In addition, I see SDF as an organization that protects Japan, not some person.”

Doi understood that she was watching Kuze with her own eyes, so Doi agreed with her, looking at her cold face and that appraisal. This woman is a pragmatist. She is not moved by emotions and feelings. An ideal SDF officer should look like her, in a sense.

“...That’s why he can be trusted,” – she added, and for a moment, her face was clouded by sadness.

“That’s good, I could say, but...” – Doi put away the documents and crossed his arms.

“Sense of mission and justice are better kept absent. Especially in SDF.”

“Is it your experience?”

“Yeah.”

Doi leaned on the pipe chair, and found in his chest pocket lighter and tobacco. He bought a really large amount of Japanese tobacco before departure, but now he’s worried about how much is left.

“Well, I got an idea of who that Kuze is. Do you smoking?”

Doi looked like he was thinking about something. Itai pushed out that ordinary officer Kuze, so it's natural that Doi is interested now. Itai didn't think long, she promptly shook her head with a bitter expression.

"No, thanks. By the way, smoking is prohibited here."

Doi smiled kindly, saying he is understanding that and went towards the tent exit. As if he remembered something, Itai turned his face to Doi.

"Tell that Kuze that if anything happens I'll wipe his ass clean this time. I have no choice because he's such a damn valuable youngling. Let him do whatever he want. Tell him this," – Doi told to her, holding the tobacco in his mouth.

Footnotes:

[1] (Crywolf: Just in case someone didn't understand what they were talking about.

They basically said that they were too inexperienced. In game terms a Noob.)
(Arocks: Green = Greenhorn, basically a newbie who doesn't know the workings of the world)

Chapter 3 – In the city

Lety's daily work is preparing the café for opening every morning. She is yet to become seventeen this year. Her job is using her own beauty to attract customers. Her white long hair was gathered in a ponytail, she had put on an apron that gives her freedom of movement, and on top of that – her vivacious personality.

She finished cleaning the tables and went to the kitchen. She lit a fire to a kitchen stove and started to cook some soup. It was the first day she was doing this job so quickly. She had decided her prospects, so she now bought bread and soup, spending her last savings, and went to the third floor.

“Father, how are you?”

Right after she entered the room, she put on the band and got closer to her father's bed. Originally, there were two workers who ran the café. This “Seawolf's rookery” is a small cheap restaurant with the front opening onto the central square. The first floor is a restaurant in the daytime and a bar at night. The second floor is a hostel for travelers, and the third floor is where they live. In this world, pretty much all of the restaurants looked more or less like this.

“I'm almost fine. I'll be able to stand up soon.”

He had a sinuous body that you'd think was of a warrior if only he didn't stand in the kitchen. The regular customers often said that they were happy Lety looked like her mother. However, this father had been powerless against the “Meteor's eye”. When he was trying to escape the war fire, the church closed its door and he was running around the city when a part of the meteor hit him. Lety was covered by her father, but he was seriously injured.

“That's good! It must be God's protection.”

She smiled with ease hearing the father's words. He is the only relative after her mother died due to disease.

“Here is your breakfast!”

“Thank you.”

Her father tried to hide his ashamed face from his daughter and took his tray. She sat down on the bed's corner.

"I was worried if those strange men would do something to you."

After the "Meteor's eye" had fallen, they run to the church for healing magic, but it was already full of injuries, there was no chance somebody would see her father's wounds. When they were at a loss, a strange green moving box approached. The box had a red cross on a white back. People in green and brown clothes got out of there and took her father inside.

"Acute care required! Triage red category!" they shouted, or something, she doesn't remember. But now father's alive. Lety couldn't believe that her father would survive after those strange men treated him.

Her father was eating his breakfast when he raised his face to his daughter.

"You know, Lety..."

"What is it?"

"Do you know that your father was in the army long ago?"

"Yeah. You met my mother there, right?"

He looked at her face that is similar to mother's and continued.

"That's right. Your mother was nursing wounded people. You know, usually, there was no chance to save somebody with such wounds..."

The father was looked like he doubts about his saving.

"Hey! Father, are you saying that it'd be better if you had not been saved?"

"Of course not! The strange thing is with my left leg. It was mangled so badly it would be hard to save my life even by severing the leg, but now my leg wound is closing up without even festering."

From his army experience, he knew survival rate for various kinds of wounds.

Medicine of this world is bad. It does not even have disinfection. Death caused by infections in a small wound is not rare. Therefore, it was strange for him to be alive with no physical defects. He couldn't possibly know that the reason for that are proper disinfection, surgical operation, blood transfusion,

and even antibiotics.

“That’s God’s protection! God must have saved you instead of the church who drove us out!”

“I see, you might be right...”

“Those strange foreigners in green clothes helped us too, right? After you’re healed, we’ll go to worship them and give alms.”

“U-Um.”

The father continued to eat the daughter’s breakfast and nodded, but the strange feeling did not disappear.

An SDF’s Pajero is slowly moving in the city. It’d be dangerous otherwise. There are no intersections or traffic lights, no signs, and the roadways are not marked out. People are walking in front of the car as though that’s how it should be. Driving normally is a suicide. Oh, not suicide, it’s murder. The car goes slowly and stops here and there.

“There is no point to use a car, right?”

“Oh, shut up... Try to make the plan by yourself, then.”

When he tried to submit a plan with no car, captain Itai rejected it.

“Can you be sure that you’d be able to get the required heaps of data? Can you give proof of risk absence?”

Kuze knows terribly well how hard to put own opinion through to his bosses.

“But there are few of people in the streets.”

Ryumi was looking outside with sad expression when somebody runs in front of the car.

“Oops. What is it? There were more of them earlier?”

Kuze can’t scare people due to the plan so he doesn’t use horn, so Kuze stopped the car.

“Yes. We’re close to the central square, where many things take place. But now I rarely see even hawkers...”

Kuze looked around. Indeed, a part of the meteor caused serious damage here, so there not much of people now.

“Can we go to the central square?”

“Yes, if we would make a base point there, it would be easier to walk in all directions from there. That’s how I studied this city when I just came here. By the way, I know a good café! What about having a lunch there?”

“Oh, that would be great. I’ve only eaten bread this morning, so I’m pretty hungry...”

“Okay, let’s move there.”

Ryumi explained the way very clearly and thoroughly. Probably, she had a good practice as a priest explaining God’s teachings. In either case, Kuze reassured that he chose the right person, and started to drive. Suddenly, Kuze noticed something unusual.

“I notice some armed groups from time to time. Are they the reinforcements of the Inland Army?”

Ryumi was surprised.

“No way! They are vultures!”

“Vultures?” – Ichinose turned back to the rear seat.

“They are mercenaries. They must have come to the city because they smelled war,” – answered Ryumi with rare disgusted expression. The small group of armed men is walking as if it’s their own place and drinking alcohol despite the sun has rose not so long ago. Their vulgar laughter is scaring common passers-by. They don’t have united arms like the Inland Army; they have various arms. On the face of them, they’re not diligent people. If a pure girl like Ryumi calls them “vultures”, they must be hated.

“Could it be they planned to go to the Mariesa Army, but their plans got corrupted, and they are angry?”

Well, mercenaries are by definition always looking for hirers. Yet, Ryumi shook her head.

“No, sir Kuze,” – said Ryumi and looked at them with disdain.

“They wanted to enter the Empire Army.”

“I see,” – mumbled Kuze and made a deep sigh.

It was the first day Lety opened the café since the war. She wanted the locals to see their well-known Seawolf’s rookery opening once again and remember the past. Also, her father’s wounds are healing so she is in good mood. The provisions are not restored enough, so the café is operating during lunchtime only, but still, it’s a good step forward after the war.

“Okay, that’s great.”

She did all she had to do without her father and put the table “Open” before the door.

“Hello, please come to us! Hello! Mariesa food is open again!”

Lety was calling for customers on the square. But there are not many people, it’s nothing in comparison with activity before the war. But she hoped to have customers even now and called them with a wide vivid smile.

“Okay!”

She returned inside and began to wipe plates. When the meteor fell, a good part of them was broken, and the plates that remained intact were covered by dust. She didn’t finish cleaning yet. Well, it’s okay since there won’t be too much of customers. She was polishing intact utensils.

After a while, a strange sound came from outside.

Ro-ro-ro-ro-ro-ro-kin!

It was the first time she heard it. She thought it’s a traveling performer imitates breath of some bird from far away. But why would somebody do that?...

(What is that sound?..)

She sat calmly, when she heard voices near the café.

“Why won’t you get a parking ticket?”

“I can’t find “No Parking” sign, so it’s okay.”

“Yes, it’s okay, carriages are often parked here.”

Those were voices of two young men and a girl. Lety remembered the girl's voice.

(That voice... Could it be!...)

She stood up and in the same moment the door was opened and the girl came in.

"Hello there! Are you opened?"

"Priest Ryumi!"

Lety jumped out of joy.

"Lety-san, I'm glad you're well."

Ryumi and Lety are smiling at each other.

"I'm so happy you're the first customer today!"

"Thank you... Also, I'm just a priest disciple yet..."

"Oh, don't be shy! Please, take a seat anywhere."

Lety was very happy. Ryumi was a regular customer here for ages. She was explaining the teaching to people with no affectation, talk about other's problems, so she was something like a saint for devout Lety. She could even think that her father's condition is improving owing to Ryumi.

Excited Lety heard man's voice.

"Ryumi-san, do you know her?"

"Eh?"

Lety's breath was taken away when she saw the man. She saw that uniform comprised of green, ground-brown, and black blotch pattern; he should be the heretic or one of those mercenaries.

"Priest, please stay back!"

Lety quickly covered Ryumi by standing between her and the men and glared at the men.

"Why did you come, you heretics!"

"H-heretics?.."

Lety gave an angry glare at the two men.

“You’re wrong, they’re our saviors...” – said Ryumi, and Lety made a terrifying guess. Priest Ryumi is a kind person, so she could approach them out of compassion or preach to them. And something terrifying had happened to her, like to the father.

“Priest, don’t do it! Don’t listen to their words! They must have applied hypnosis magic on you!” Lety gets excited on her own, while Kuze and Ichinose have a feeling that they are seeing something they should not see. That’s kind of scary.

“That’s not it!” – Ryumi’s voice resounded in the café.

A well-polished glass cup with water is on a table.

“Please, priest, water.”

“Thank you, Lety.”

Ryumi took the cup by both hands. Then, Lety threw two more cups.

“Hey, I don’t know are you priest’s slaves or servants, but be glad you can sit in the same seat with the priest,” – said Lety with the coarse voice. The cups she gave them was not glass cups, but cheap wooden cups. They were so old they smelt rotten wood, and something floated inside. It’s hard to call civility. The water that is sold to customers and the water for washing that was taken from a draw well are two different types of water.

“Oh, thanks...”

Kuze and Ichinose took those cups, but they didn’t drink that, looked at each other and threw that water in a window. They used water that they brought in canteens. Ryumi pretended she didn’t see that and worried if Lety would do something provoking anymore.

Ryumi failed to convince Lety that Kuze and Ichinose saved their lives, so she told that they are converts from another country who are under her education now.

Ryumi was still a teenager, but her stomach was hurt, and she couldn’t taste all that cooking.

“I’m sorry, sir Kuze...”

“It’s okay, we’re grateful to you,” – answered Kuze with a bitter smile. It wasn’t a joke, in fact, they wouldn’t have been here without Ryumi, and didn’t enter the café. Kuze didn’t think bad of Ryumi, however he is suspicious towards the church. According to Ryumi, archpriest Geroud is a schemer and egocentric man. He guessed that SDF has no covering, so it’s fine to use them by the church’s authority.

It was bad that people were deceived by the church, like Lety. What should we do?

The quickest way is that SDF shows own power making the church to retreat, and the Inland Army would be unable to say a word against them. However, this way is the way of creating an enemy. Attacking something that the people believe in would make all of them hate SDF, like Lety.

(The church’s elite must have understood that as well.) It was unrealistic to imagine usage of power in order to oppress the opponent. SDF never in its history worked like this. The SDF officers would not act like yakuza. Kuze is not thinking about that seriously. So what next, then? While Kuze was thinking, a place fell in front of him.

“Hey, eat it.”

Her voice tone was rude, but the cooking looked very tasty. Also, it was not a single table. She was bringing plates one after another. This place is near the sea, so most of the dishes were fish. Ryumi was very proud of Lety’s cooking.

“Go ahead, sir Kuze, sir Ichinose, until it’s cold.”

“About cold... It doesn’t seem like that girl’s attitude changed. Oh!”

Kuze remembered about the duties. He put out of the pocket his camera and took a photo. Understanding of the this world’s cooking is an important mission that stupid people don’t do. Every country or church can have food taboo and manners. This is an important duty as well that should be done before the provisions delivery began. However, it was simply because the church was responsible for that.

“Sir Kuze, what are you doing?” – Ryumi heard the camera sound and looks at

it.

“I took a photo,” – answered Kuze, but she is amazed. Well, that’s natural. Kuze smiled and showed her the photo he just made.

“Wow! How could you make pretty picture so quickly?”

Ryumi mistook the unmoving photo with a painting, apparently, and comparing the photographic subject with the photo.

“It’s called a camera, a device that can make a replica of what we can see.”

“It’s like magic thoughtography?”

“I don’t know whether magic can do this, but you’re probably right.”

“That’s strange... Thoughtography demands long concentration, but you did it instantly.”

Ryumi is looking at the camera with curiosity, while continuing to eat the food.

He tried to eat a boiled fish. For a Japanese, it has a deeper taste, but lighter aftertaste. Something similar to a salted salmon. Kuze and Ichinose are young men who are working using their muscles, so they need saltiness and greasiness.

During the Period of Warring States of Japan, a simple fare was the exceptional right of the privileged classes. The warriors who were fighting on the front lines had quite heavy meals. The cooking in front of those two officers was just perfect for them.

“Whoa, what a tasty chicken meat, second lieutenant Kuze!”

“Yeah, we’re eating only canned meals recently, so this is good.”

They two forgot about the duty and enjoyed the cooking of this world. Ryumi seemed to be happy that they liked it, and began to eat salad.

“How is it, priest?”

“It’s very good. Isn’t it great that you could open your café again?”

Lety was very happy and gave Ryumi a bonus plate.

“Oh, I can’t!”

“A-ha-ha! It’s okay, consider this as a repayment. The church saved us by the provisions.”

Kuze and Ichinose frozen. Ryumi’s smile frozen wide, too. Lety didn’t see her face.

“It wasn’t just me. We couldn’t get any food after the war, so we couldn’t die of hunger without help. My father couldn’t move, and he was depressed because there was not enough of food, but you... you didn’t just give us food, you gave us finished meals! I am a cook, so I can understand how difficult it is to cook so much every day.”

Lety was dreamy, holding Ryumi’s hands.